

THE

British Empire League.

OFFICES AT

BOTOLPH HOUSE, EASTCHEAP, E.C.

(C. FREEMAN MURRAY, Secretary.)

Report of Inaugural Meeting

OF THE LEAGUE HELD ON

Wednesday, January 29th, 1896,

AT THE

MANSION HOUSE.

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C. FREEMAN MURRAY.



HIS GRACE THE DUKE OF DEVONSHIRE, K.G.,
President.

THE BRITISH EMPIRE LEAGUE.

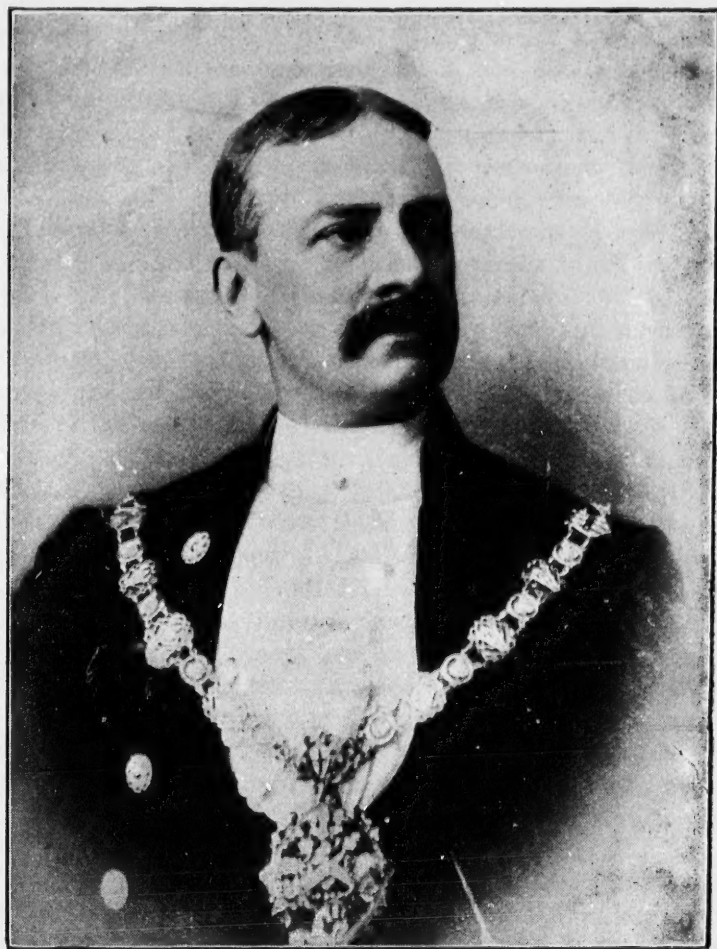
INAUGURAL MEETING AT THE MANSION HOUSE.

The inaugural meeting of the British Empire League was held on January 29, 1896, at the Mansion House, under the Presidency of the Lord Mayor. The League is the outcome of a conference held on July 20, 1894, when it was unanimously resolved to establish an association with the object of maintaining and strengthening the connection between the United Kingdom and the outlying portions of the Empire, by the discussion and promotion of questions of common interest, more particularly those relating to trade arrangements and mutual defence. In pursuance of this resolution a further meeting was held at the House of Commons on May 30, 1895, Sir John Lubbock, Bart., M.P., in the chair, when it was determined to constitute the proposed association on the following lines:—The association to be called “The British Empire League.” It shall be the primary object of the League to secure the permanent unity of the Empire. The following to be among the other principal objects of the League:—(a) To promote trade between the United Kingdom, the Colonies, and India, and to advocate the holding of periodical meetings of representatives from all parts of the Empire for the discussion of matters of general commercial interest, and the consideration of the best means of expanding the national trade. (b) To consider how far it may be possible to modify any laws or treaties which impede freedom of action in the making of reciprocal trade arrangements between the United Kingdom and other parts of the Empire, or between any two or more British Colonies or possessions. (c) To promote closer intercourse between the different parts of the Empire by the establishment of cheaper and, where required, more direct steam and telegraphic communication, preference being given to routes not traversing foreign territory.

(d) To develop the principles on which all parts of the Empire may best share in its general defence, endeavouring to bring into harmony public opinion at home and in the Colonies on this subject, and to devise a more perfect co-operation of the military and naval forces of the Empire, with a special view to the due protection of trade routes. (e) To assimilate, as far as local circumstances permit, the laws relating to copyright, patents, legitimacy, and bankruptcy, throughout the Empire. The League will also advocate the establishment of periodical Conferences to deal with such questions as may appear ripe for consideration, on the lines of the London Conference of 1887 and the Ottawa Conference of 1894. The meeting of January 29, 1896, was convened to consider the following resolutions :—(1) That the attention of our fellow countrymen throughout the Empire is invited to the recent establishment of the British Empire League, and that their support by membership and subscriptions is strongly recommended. (2) That this meeting learns with great satisfaction that His Grace the Duke of Devonshire, K.G., has accepted the position of President of the British Empire League, and also confirms the appointment of the following officers, viz. :—The Right Hon. Sir John Lubbock, Bart., M.P., hon. treasurer ; Sir Robert Herbert, G.C.B., chairman of executive ; Mr. W. Herbert Daw, acting hon. treasurer ; and Mr. C. Freeman Murray, secretary. (3) That this meeting expresses its thanks to the Right Hon. the Lord Mayor for granting the use of the Mansion House, and for his kindness in presiding on this occasion. There was a large attendance. Mr. Albert Sandeman, Governor of the Bank of England, wrote regretting inability to attend, and a letter of similar purport was received from Sir Albert Rollit, President of the London Chamber of Commerce.

The LORD MAYOR said he could scarcely conceive that a more important matter could call them together, neither could he conceive a more serious moment in which to discuss the questions before them. He trusted that whatever they did would be for the benefit of the country to which they were all attached.

Sir JOHN LUBBOCK, M.P., moved the first resolution. He said that, to the regret of the City branch, the Imperial Federation League had been dissolved by a majority of one in consequence of some difference of opinion on the council. The City

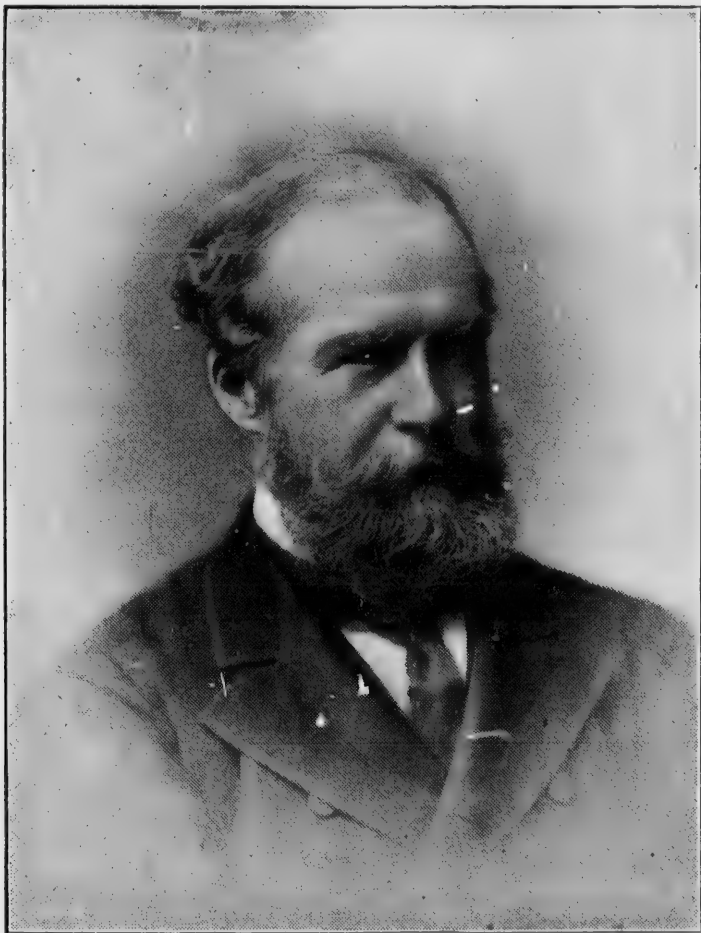


THE RIGHT HON. THE LORD MAYOR OF LONDON
(*Sir Walter Henry Wilkin*).

branch had been in communication with various branches in this country and the Colonies, who were determined to continue the work, though on a somewhat different basis. Though this resolution had no reference to recent events, and had been arrived at months ago, still the circumstances of the last few weeks had shown the importance of, if not necessity for, some such organisation. In ancient history there were great empires which crumbled to pieces by their own weight; but they rested on the power of a despotic monarch or were kept together by armed forces. Ours was knit by affection for our gracious Sovereign, by the force of our common interests, sympathy, and goodwill, and our pride in the great Empire of which we formed a part. In the words of an American statesman, "The flag of England waves on every sea and in every port, and the morning drum-beat of her soldiers, following the sun and keeping company with the hours, circles the earth with one continuous strain of the martial airs of England." Our Army and Navy, like our volunteers, are, however, for defence, not defiance; we threaten no one, but fully intend to defend that which is our own, and we can trust them to protect the Empire from any foreign foe. When we call it "ours" we include the Colonies as fully as the Mother Country; we include India, which we are glad to know is prosperous and contented. For all this we have to thank our statesmen, our Army and our Navy, and, above all, the character and indomitable energy of our own people. No nation has contributed more to the progress of human knowledge. In mathematics we have Newton and Young; in astronomy, Herschell and Adams; in chemistry, Dalton, Cavendish and Davy; in physics, Dalton and Tyndall; in geology, Smith, Lyell, and Murchison; in natural history, Ray, Darwin, and Huxley. In medicine the circulation of the blood was discovered by Harvey, vaccination by Jenner, anæsthetics by Davy and Simpson, antiseptic treatment by Lister; in inventions, Newcomen and Watt, Stephenson, Wheatstone, and Arkwright; in political economy, Adam Smith and Ricardo. No nation has a purer or nobler literature: we have Shakespeare, Bacon, Milton, and many immortal names; and the English language—our mother tongue—is a bond of union, and bids fair to be the general language of the human race. These and other illustrious names are a glorious inheritance, of which we are all proud. Lastly, in the

art or science of government, is not our country the Mother of Parliaments? We often speak of these islands as the "Old Country," but that is only by comparison: we still glow with the fire and force of youth; we are still growing—not merely in numbers and wealth and material prosperity—but in those social and moral conditions which constitute the true glory of a country, and form the only solid basis of the prosperity of a people. We are told that we are isolated. This I deny. There may be jealousy in some quarters; but there are many countries which do us justice. In any case, it is somewhat absurd to speak of the isolation of 300,000,000 men. We have not owed our position either to the kindness or forbearance of other nations, but have won it for ourselves. There never was, I believe, a time when the Mother Country and the rest of the Empire were more firmly bound together by mutual sympathy and goodwill. Of this our League is evidence, and to promote and preserve this happy union is the main object with which the League has been founded. The Duke of Devonshire has consented to become President, and we could have no better—none who would more unite us all. Sir Robert Herbert's great experience will be invaluable in the chair of the Committee, and in founding this League we shall show our desire to maintain the ties which bind us to the Colonies, and shall be taking a step which will tend to maintain and to strengthen the unity of the Empire.

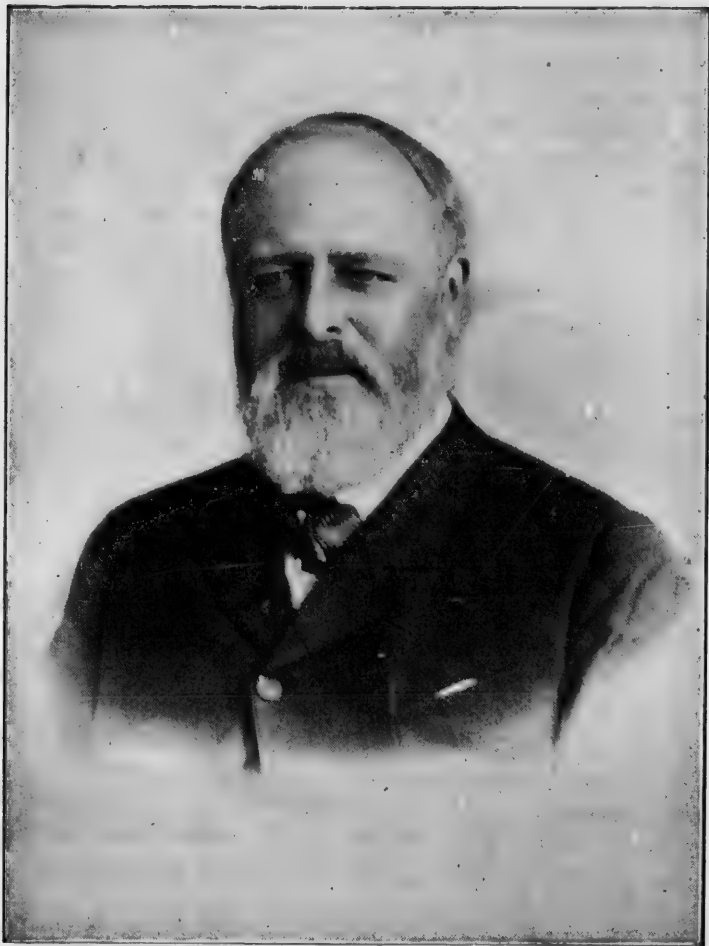
Sir ROBERT G. W. HERBERT, in seconding the resolution, said Sir John Lubbock had given them such a clear and interesting account of the circumstances attending the origin of this new League and the objects it desires to attain that there was little left to say in that direction. As, however, he (Sir Robert) was going to be proposed as one of the officers of the League, it was almost necessary for him to say a few words as to his view of the lines on which they hoped to work. They had not yet been in a position to hold a public meeting, and the present assemblage, therefore, was not so imposing in point of numbers as some that had been held in that room. The attendance of prominent public men and distinguished speakers not already members of the League had not been secured on that occasion; it was simply the first General Meeting of the members of the League. It was hardly necessary, indeed, that there should be a public meeting to introduce this



THE RIGHT HON. SIR JOHN LUBBOCK, BART., M.P.,
Hon. Treasurer.

organisation to the citizens of London, because they were proceeding on the lines which were laid down in 1889 at the great meeting at the Mansion House at which the London Branch of the late Imperial Federation League was founded. That house, as he might say, had been closed for repairs, and was now about to be reopened with some substantial alterations; but the business to be carried on would be much the same as that contemplated by the late Imperial Federation League, with the material exception that it was not proposed to advocate at the present time any scheme for the political federation of the various parts of the Empire. With other officers of the League, he felt that the duties they were about to undertake were delicate and difficult, and they must tread warily and discreetly if they were to avoid giving offence to the feelings and principles of those whom they wanted to support the League. In fact, if he were asked to state the objects of the League, he should begin by stating what the League did *not* intend to do. They did not propose, for instance, to offer to instruct the brilliant and energetic statesman who presided over the Colonial Office how to conduct his business, or how to achieve that union of hearts which he so heartily desired, and which he had already done so much to promote during his short tenure of office; nor did they mean to lecture the statesmen or Parliaments of the Colonies as to their duties and responsibilities. The Colonies were sensitive in regard to the assumption by any volunteer body of a dictatorial attitude as to the way in which they should conduct their own affairs and the part they should play in relation to the Empire at large. Their people could be led, but certainly not driven, and everyone must have observed how promptly and how heartily the Colonies came forward the other day with assurances of their loyalty at a time when these assurances were peculiarly acceptable. What the League hoped to do was, on the contrary, to abstain from embarking on political controversies, and from identifying itself with any extreme views on fiscal and financial policy; but in public as well as in private life there was plenty of room for the friendly intervention, whether of persons or of associations such as the British Empire League, especially in regard to the matters specified in the constitution; and its opportunities of being useful in this way were enhanced by

being located in the City of London under the auspices of the Lord Mayor. The programme of the League dealt principally with commercial matters, and in regard to one point of this kind they had already taken action, which he trusted would have the approval of the members. A few weeks ago a number of leading firms called the attention of the executive committee to the fact that there is in Canada no effective insolvency law, which caused great distrust over here. Sir Charles Tupper, who was still in this country at the time, accepted the League's invitation to meet representatives of these firms, and read them a very admirable paper explaining the position of the question in Canada, and showing that the Canadian Government was much disposed to address itself to the introduction of a thoroughly sound bankruptcy law, and that it would regard the action of the League in recommending legislation as an assistance rather than an intrusion. They were circulating a memorial on the subject, and it had already been signed by a great number of the leading firms in this country, and it would be sent to Canada, with a strong representation of the commercial feeling in Great Britain on the matter. Turning to the constitution of the League, which was in the hands of the meeting, it should be considered to be only in draft; but in the present draft it had been their desire to avoid giving offence to any section of public opinion. It was possible that some amendments could be made, and the executive of the League would be very glad to hear from any gentleman who had suggestions to offer. One of the articles of the constitution dealt with co-operation for national defence, and on that he wished it to be understood that the League were not proceeding on the principle advocated by some well-intentioned gentlemen who required that certain fixed contributions for Imperial defence, and more particularly towards the cost of the Imperial Navy, should be made by the Colonies. The Colonies did not approve of a demand made in that form, but at the same time professed themselves ready to bear in some form their reasonable share in the cost of defence. The League was not about to propound any specific solution of this question, regarding it as a political one. He made this explanation because a distinguished Australian whom he had asked to come and speak that day had desired to be excused on the ground that he had misgivings as to the intentions of the League in this matter. There was another subject



THE HON. SIR ROBERT G. W. HERBERT, G.C.B.,
Chairman of Executive.

which did not exactly lie within the scope of the League, and as to which he would like to make an observation on his own individual responsibility. He (Sir Robert Herbert) believed that such an organisation might do good outside the Empire as well as within it. Mr. Balfour had lately made a very interesting reference to the necessity of having close and friendly relations in regard to all subjects with our American cousins, and he thought that this League might be taken advantage of by those American gentlemen who were anxious to co-operate with this country in commercial and other matters, and who would be ready enough to grasp a hand held out to them. There was a strong and increasing belief in the desirableness and the possibility of establishing an efficient federation between the two great branches of the Anglo-Saxon race, and, although this was outside the actual province of the League, yet it might possibly be made useful in this direction. In conclusion, Sir R. Herbert said that he trusted that before the Lord Mayor's tenure of office had expired it might be practicable to arrange under his auspices, if he would kindly accord that further favour to the British Empire League, for a public meeting at which their distinguished President might be able to be present.

The CHAIRMAN put the resolution to the meeting, and declared it carried.

Mr. RICHARD R. DOBELL, of Quebec, in moving the second resolution, said it had afforded him the most lively satisfaction to be present at that meeting. The subject of Imperial Unity had occupied his mind for a great many years. Eighteen years ago a resolution was passed at a meeting of the Dominion Board of Trade in Ottawa, expressing the desire to draw closer the trade relations between Great Britain and her Colonies, and also between the Colonies themselves. A deputation was then appointed to come to London on the subject, of which he was one. They had great difficulty in finding any representative body to give them a hearing—it was that difficulty which led to the formation of the London Chamber of Commerce; and I know that Sir John Lubbock will remember the efforts that he, with Mr. Westgarth and others, made to establish it. After some delay, and aided by the Council of the Associated Chambers of Commerce, a conference was held, and it was attended by representatives not only of this country, but also of our several

Colonies. After three days' discussion the resolution of the Dominion Board of Trade was carried unanimously, and an association was formed, called the British and Colonial Union, which, he was sorry to say, died when it was only two years old. The next movement was under the presidency of the late Right Hon. W. E. Forster. He initiated it by an essay which was largely circulated, and called "Imperial Federation," and I may say that this essay contained a clear exposition of what the aims of the League were. The death of Mr. Forster was a serious loss to the League, and, owing to the indifference of some and internal dissension, the Imperial Federation League was broken up, although the City Branch continued its organisation. That day they were merely transplanting the tree that was planted in the formation of the Imperial Federation League, and were lopping off one of the branches in the title "Imperial," to meet the views of our South African and Australian members. With this slight change, my lord, I move that the names proposed as the permanent officers of this League be accepted, and that with the fullest confidence we leave to them the guidance of this movement, feeling assured that their best efforts and personal attention will be given to the work. It might be asked why Canada meddled with this matter. At this meeting, my lord, it is neither the time nor place to introduce any question that might raise up any discussion on the fiscal question. Sir Robert Herbert has pointed out what the members in the Mother Country should not do; perhaps I might add that, however strong the Colonies might feel in the wisdom of their policy, it would hardly be consistent or considerate to press them unduly upon the notice of this great country. It was in recognition of the great obligation that every Canadian owed to the Mother Country. The feeling of union with the Mother Country was strong in the heart of every Canadian. There was no example of any other country than Great Britain giving to any of her peoples a great continent like that of Canada without the slightest charge—Crown lands, roads, and every public work which had been constructed, had been given up without even the cost of the parchment which embodied the gift. Every effort had been made by Great Britain to make Canada strong, independent, and as free as this country itself. Canada was almost free to make her own treaties, and, at all events, no treaties were



MR. W. HERBERT DAW.
Acting Hon. Treasurer.

made without advising with the High Commissioner. He might say the same of Australia and of every other free and independent British Colony. It must have been no little satisfaction to the people of this country to have from Australia the sentiments of loyal Irishmen who wished to show that they had no part with that irreconcilable element which had declared that if the enemies of Great Britain should arise against her Irishmen would be glad. In Canada they would find Irishmen expressing as heartily as he did the strong feelings of loyalty which inspired Canadians from Quebec to British Columbia. What was said by a hostile element in the United States looked alarming when flashed across the cable, but it was the feeling of only a small section in America. It was as if one collected all the police reports in Great Britain and published them. What a dreadful country this would seem; but such a report would not represent the happy life that existed here. Nor did such expressions as were sometimes sent from America represent the generous feelings of the people of the United States. He attended a convention in Cleveland, Ohio, lately, and was greatly struck by the friendly attitude of the Americans he met there, and a resolution was passed to the effect that if any agreement was come to for an international deep waterway canal being constructed, any dispute arising between the two countries must be submitted to arbitration, and the object of this League is to make every component part in complete unison with this country. To-day Great Britain, instead of being isolated, was never so jealously guarded by her sons all over the world. I have much pleasure in moving the second resolution.

The Hon. Sir CHARLES FREMANTLE, in seconding the resolution, said that after the excellent speeches they had heard he would not say much. There was no doubt about the usefulness of such a body as the British Empire League, and he was glad to see that so level-headed and cool-minded a man as the Duke of Devonshire—a constructive statesman and a good judge of men—should have accepted the presidency of it. In regard to its Chairman of Executive, Sir Robert Herbert, he had had a distinguished career in the Colonial Service, and although civil servants did not call themselves statesmen, he might almost be looked upon as such.

The CHAIRMAN having put the motion to the meeting, it was carried unanimously.

Mr. FAITHFULL BEGG, M.P., in proposing the third resolution, said that since 1889, when the City Branch of the Imperial Federation League was founded, they had been favoured with the patronage of successive Lord Mayors. It was important to understand that this was a revival of the City of London Branch of the Imperial Federation League. Indeed, it might be said that the City of London Branch of that League had never been dead, for the secretary had gone on sending out notices and collecting funds since its apparent demise. They were fortunate in having a chairman like Sir Robert Herbert. He (Mr. Begg) wished it to be clearly understood that there was no mistake about the carrying out of the general policy of the City of London Branch of the Imperial Federation League by the new organisation, which, if it could do anything to bind closer together the various parts of the Empire when we were left in a position of what had been called "splendid isolation," would amply justify its existence.

The resolution was seconded by Mr. HERBERT DAW in a few well-chosen words, and carried unanimously.

The CHAIRMAN, in returning thanks, said the Mansion House could hardly be put to a better purpose than to assist the objects of the League. He did not need to remind them that a Lord Mayor, after his election, existed by the prosperity of the City, and he hoped the result of that meeting would be to encourage that prosperity by advancing the interests of the whole Empire.

The proceedings then terminated.



MR. C. FREEMAN MURRAY,
Secretary.

REPRINT OF LEADING ARTICLE IN THE "STANDARD"
OF JANUARY 30.

An important meeting was held at the Mansion House yesterday, under the presidency of the Lord Mayor, for the purpose of laying the foundation-stone, so to speak, of the new British Empire League, intended to supply the place vacated by the dissolution of the Imperial Federation League. The object of the association is mainly, though not exclusively, of a commercial character, and is intended to knit together the various portions of the Empire by still closer bonds than those which unite them at the present moment. The means to be employed for this purpose are set out under five different heads, the most valuable of all, perhaps, being the suggested "periodical meetings of representatives from all parts of the Empire for the discussion of matters of general commercial interest, and the best means of expanding the national trade." The second suggestion is one that looks extremely well upon paper, but may possibly cover more than appears to lie on the surface. It is to "consider how far it may be possible to modify any laws or treaties which impede freedom of action in the making of reciprocal trade arrangements between the United Kingdom and the Colonies, or between any two or more British Colonies or Possessions." In the next place, we are told that it is desirable, as undoubtedly it is, to promote closer intercourse between the different parts of the Empire "by the development of direct steam and telegraphic communication." The assimilation of the law relating to copyrights, patents, legitimacy, and bankruptcy throughout the Empire figures fourth on the list; and last, but not least, we are invited to "devise a more perfect co-operation of the military and naval forces of the Empire, with a special view to the due protection of trade routes." These are the principal objects which the British Empire League sets before itself; and they were supported in a short but very eloquent speech by Sir John Lubbock. He based the justification of such an association on the paramount necessity of bracing the British Empire together, and making it conscious of its unity at all points. It is on the broad basis of common interests, sympathies, and

character that he would weld our scattered Colonial Empire into one Imperial unit, having regard, of course, to the separate local institutions which our Colonies have developed. Sir John Lubbock drew the usual comparison between the Colonies of antiquity and our own, reminding us of Mr. Balfour's reference to the Spanish Empire in his speech last week at Manchester. But it strikes us that Sir John Lubbock must have been thinking also of the Colonial Empire of ancient Athens, which was held together "by armed force," and which ultimately fell to pieces through the unpopularity of the very system which, according to Sir Robert Herbert, has been suggested as an example to ourselves; that is to say, the practice of levying contributions on the Colonies towards a general Imperial Defence Fund. Our Colonies would probably resent such a proposal as this as much as the Athenian Colonies resented the demands made upon them. Great Britain has wisely kept clear of this most mischievous precedent; and her policy is evidently appreciated. Mr. Dobell, the delegate from Quebec, said that there "was no example in history of any country dealing with her Colonies as Great Britain had dealt with hers." We know very well that there is a not inconsiderable party in the country who think that England has shown herself less responsive to the loyalty of her Colonies than she ought to have done. Their attitude in the present crisis, however, does not seem as if there were much ground for this indictment. And, at all events, whatever may have happened in the past, we may hope that all memory of it will die away under the influence of such bodies as the British Empire League, which ought to be a sufficient assurance to the Colonists of our desire to draw together as closely as possible the bonds which now unite us, be they material, intellectual, or political. In literature, in science, and in the art of government the Mother Country enjoys a pre-eminence which her children should be proud to share, and which, in some future generation, they may be able to emulate.

TERMS OF MEMBERSHIP.

Minimum Subscription of Membership, One Guinea per annum.

The Friends of the League are reminded of the great expense necessarily incurred in the production and in the distribution under the existing postal system, of its correspondence and literature.

Subscriptions in excess of the above towards meeting this expenditure will be gladly received and acknowledged by the Secretary.

STANDING ORDER.

To
Messrs & Co.

*Pay to the Order of the British Empire League now, and
hereafter, on the 1st January in each year until further notice the
sum of*

SIGNATURE

ADDRESS

DATE

£ :

*This Order to be returned to the Secretary, British Empire League,
Botolph House, Eastcheap, E.C.*